



Submission to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety

30 July 2020

Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety

Overview

- Volunteers are a vital part of the aged care workforce, supporting the wellbeing of older people in their homes and in residential settings. Volunteers should be considered strategically in workforce planning and should not be undertaking roles that are more appropriately done by paid staff.
- Volunteering is time freely given, but enabling volunteering is not free. Like paid workers, volunteers need induction, training and ongoing management. Funding needs to be available to support volunteering programs and to comply with the Aged Care Quality Standards and legislative requirements.
- If the role of volunteers is not fully and appropriately considered in how aged care should be delivered in the future, older people will not receive the care and support that they need and deserve.

Introduction

About Volunteering Australia

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering, working to advance volunteering in the Australian community. The seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies work to advance and promote volunteering in their respective jurisdictions and are Foundation Members of Volunteering Australia. Volunteering Australia's vision is to promote strong, connected communities through volunteering. Our mission is to lead, strengthen, promote and celebrate volunteering in Australia.

About the Royal Commission

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety was established on 8 October 2018 by the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, His Excellency General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Retd).

The task of the Royal Commission is "to determine the full extent of the problems in Australia's aged care system and how best to meet the challenges and the opportunities of delivering aged care now and into the future"¹. An interim report to provide an update on progress was published on 31 October 2019 and the Commission is required to provide a final report by 12 November 2020.

¹See the Royal Commission's interim report, page 15
<https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-02/interim-report-volume-1.pdf>

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About this submission

We welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the Royal Commission. This submission was drafted by Volunteering Australia in collaboration with the State and Territory peak volunteering bodies.

This submission complements a separate submission by Volunteering Tasmania, the peak body for volunteering in Tasmania. Volunteering Tasmania provides volunteer management support to 41 Home and Community Care (HACC) providers and to 63 Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) funders organisations that engage volunteer services.

For further detail on the challenges relating to volunteering in aged care and best practice examples, please see the Volunteering Tasmania submission. The recommendations set out below are consistent with those made by Volunteering Tasmania.

Principles and recommended changes

We ask that the Royal Commission reflect the following principles in their final report and recommendations:

- Volunteers are an integral part of the aged care workforce
- Effective strategic workforce planning includes volunteers
- Volunteer and paid worker roles need to be differentiated
- Volunteer management needs to be appropriately funded
- The challenges facing volunteering in aged care need to be addressed
- Older people should be supported to volunteer for as long as they are able

If the role of volunteers is not fully and appropriately considered in how aged care is delivered in the future, older people will not receive the care and support that they need and deserve.

Volunteers are part of the aged care workforce

Volunteers are a vital part of the aged care workforce. The 2016 National Aged Care Workforce Census and Survey² estimated that volunteers are engaged extensively across aged care, with 83 per cent of residential facilities and 51 per cent of home care and home support outlets engaging the services of volunteers. Some services, such as Meals on Wheels³, are delivered primarily by volunteers. Volunteers are not 'discretionary' – they provide care and support that is essential to the wellbeing of older people.

² <https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/work-res>

³ <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/submission/AWF.660.00126.0001.pdf>

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The report of the Aged Care Workforce Strategy Taskforce⁴ took a broad view of the workforce which included volunteers. As the Taskforce highlighted, this broad view of the workforce is important in understanding how different parts of the workforce (such as health professionals, ancillary staff and volunteers) engage with an older person on their ageing journey.

Effective strategic workforce planning includes volunteers

As an integral part of the aged care workforce, volunteers need to be considered strategically in workforce planning. This is in line with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement,⁵ which state that volunteers should be a considered and planned for as part of an organisation's strategic development.

This means that volunteering needs to part of organisational strategic planning and resources must be allocated to recruiting, training and managing volunteers. Further, volunteers need to be considered in developing Australia's overarching Aged Care Workforce Strategy to ensure that they receive the training and support they need to effectively play their role in delivering high quality care.

Volunteer and paid worker roles need to be differentiated

Volunteers are currently undertaking tasks and providing services in the aged care system that might be more appropriate for paid staff. Determining what work should be done by paid staff and what work could be done by volunteers is increasingly complex, and Volunteering Australia typically recommends seeking legal advice about this highly complex area.

The 2018 Aged Care Workforce Strategy Taskforce⁶ made clear that attention should be given to managing tasks so that volunteers do not take on work that should be undertaken by the paid workforce. The role of volunteers in aged care services needs to be carefully considered in relation to the paid workforce and, importantly, in the context of what is required to comply with the Aged Care Quality Standards. Both the potential and the limits of volunteer activities need to be considered. Volunteer roles should add value, rather than be used as a replacement for paid work.

Volunteer management needs to be funded

A common misunderstanding is that volunteering is 'free'. Like the paid workforce, the volunteer workforce requires investment in induction, compliance activities, training, and management. This requires adequate funding of volunteer practices and management. One of the recommendations of the 2011 Productivity Commission inquiry into aged care was that funding should take into account the costs associated with volunteer administration and regulation, and training and support for

⁴ <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/a-matter-of-care-australias-aged-care-workforce-strategy>

⁵ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/national-standards-and-supporting-material>

⁶ <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/a-matter-of-care-australias-aged-care-workforce-strategy>

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volunteers.⁷

The shift away from block funding of aged care services has presented challenges for services that rely on volunteers. In particular, the lack of certainty in funding constrains the ability of organisations to invest in the training and management of volunteers.

The challenges facing volunteering in aged care need to be addressed

Volunteering in aged care is critical to ongoing service provision and can also provide a pathway to employment in the sector.

There is evidence of declining rates of volunteering. In 2014⁸, national volunteering rates declined for the first time since the ABS began national voluntary work surveys in 1995. More recently, the 2019 Tasmanian State of Volunteering survey⁹ revealed an 11.2% decline in the rate of volunteering between 2014 and 2019. The 2016 State of Volunteering in Australia report¹⁰ also found an increasing misalignment between the volunteering roles that people are interested in and the roles that organisations are offering. For example, arts and culture and animal welfare tend to be oversubscribed; disability services, community services, education and aged care tend to have high volunteer vacancies.

We also know that, overall, the population is ageing, the workforce is contracting, and people are more discerning about how they want to volunteer their time. The recent review¹¹ of the Volunteer Management Activity undertaken for the Federal Department of Social Services also pointed out that there is growing demand for services that rely heavily on volunteers, such as aged care services.

If the aged care workforce is to be sustained, volunteering in aged care needs to be encouraged and facilitated and this means reducing barriers to volunteering and investing in volunteer management.

Older people should be supported to continue volunteering

It is vital that older people are supported to continue volunteering for as long as they are able. Place-based approaches to volunteering, which harness local connections, are important in supporting older people to volunteer for as long as they are able.

⁷ <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/aged-care/report/aged-care-overview-booklet.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/volunteers>

⁹ <https://www.volunteeringtas.org.au/research/the-state-of-volunteering-report-2019/>

¹⁰ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/research/stateofvolunteering/>

¹¹ <https://www.dss.gov.au/communities-and-vulnerable-people-programs-services-volunteer-management/report-on-the-review-of-the-volunteer-management-activity>

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Evidence¹² shows that volunteering in older age is associated with reduced symptoms of depression, better self-reported health, fewer functional limitations, and lower mortality. It is particularly beneficial for older people with ‘role identity absences,’ for example those who have lost a partner.

The COVID-19 restrictions have hit older volunteers particularly hard. In a recent ANU analysis commissioned by Volunteering Australia¹³, over 70 per cent of volunteers over the age of 65 stopped volunteering between February and April 2020. The research demonstrated that those who managed to continue volunteering had higher levels of life satisfaction and lower psychological distress than those who had to stopped volunteering or who were non-volunteers. As COVID-19 restrictions lift, it is important older volunteers are encouraged and supported to safely restart their volunteering.

Conclusion

Volunteers play critical roles in enabling the health and wellbeing of older people. Volunteering Australia and the State and Territory volunteering peak bodies urge the Royal Commission to recognise that volunteers are a vital part of the aged care workforce. Volunteers support the wellbeing of older people in their homes and in residential settings. It is essential that the role of volunteers is recognised, and that volunteering is strategically considered in workforce planning.

As previous inquiries¹⁴ have recognised, there are costs associate with volunteering – recruitment, induction, regulation, training and management, and recognition – and these need to be provided for when funding services that involve volunteers. Adequate funding needs to be available to support volunteering programs and to comply with the Aged Care Quality Standards and legislative requirements.

Volunteers are vital to aged care services. Nurturing and investing in the volunteering workforce will help ensure older people get the care and support they need and deserve.

¹² See for example, Anderson et al. (2014). The benefits associated with volunteering among seniors: A critical review and recommendations for future research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 140(6), 1505–1533.

¹³ <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037610>.
¹³ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/research/research-briefing-the-experience-of-volunteers-during-covid-19>

¹⁴ For example, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/aged-care/report/aged-care-summary-proposals.pdf>

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Authorisation

This submission has been authorised by the interim Chief Executive Officer of Volunteering Australia.



Mr Mark Pearce
Interim Chief Executive Officer

Endorsements

This position statement has been endorsed by the seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies.



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Volunteering Australia Contacts

Mark Pearce
Interim Chief Executive Officer
ceo@volunteeringaustralia.org
0428 186 736

Sue Regan
Policy Manager
policy@volunteeringaustralia.org
0480 258 723

State and Territory Volunteering Peak Bodies

Volunteering ACT
www.volunteeringact.org.au
02 6251 4060
info@volunteeringact.org.au

Volunteering SA&NT
www.volunteeringsa-nt.org.au
08 8221 7177
reception@volunteeringsa-nt.org.au

The Centre for Volunteering (NSW)
www.volunteering.com.au
02 9261 3600
info@volunteering.com.au

Volunteering Victoria
www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au
03 8327 8500
info@volunteeringvictoria.org.au

Volunteering Queensland
www.volunteeringqld.org.au
07 3002 7600
reception@volunteeringqld.org.au

Volunteering WA
www.volunteeringwa.org.au
08 9482 4333
info@volunteeringwa.org.au

Volunteering Tasmania
www.volunteeringtas.org.au
03 6231 5550
admin@volunteeringtas.org.au